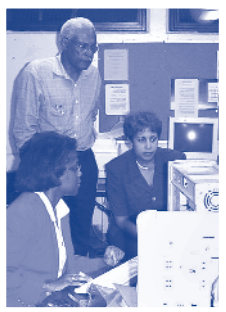


NNewsline

*Delivering Technology Access to
America's Communities*



Summer 2002



U.S. Department of Housing and
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Office of Multifamily Housing
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www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

Dedicated Volunteers Help a Center Grow

The greatest thing," comments Marshall Dickerson, "is seeing the expressions on peoples' faces who have just built a computer." Dickerson, a retired General Motors and EDS information management manager, volunteers at the Elijah Project Neighborhood Networks Center in Detroit.

Dickerson's connection with Neighborhood Networks began at Detroit's Plymouth United Church of Christ, where he is a member. The minister had received some donated computers and wanted to offer basic computer classes for senior citizens. Dickerson volunteered to set up a computer lab.

Learning the Basics

When the Elijah Project center opened at the church, Dickerson continued to volunteer, teaching people to build and use computers. In the summer of 2001, he taught an 8-week class that primarily attracted senior citizens and teachers. Some had used computers, whereas others had no experience. "The first day of class," he remembers, "I brought in a box of computer parts, and the class discussed what they knew about the insides of a computer." After the students mastered computer hardware basics, Dickerson taught them computer skills one application at a time, starting

with Microsoft Windows. "We continued with Word, then moved to Access and Excel. If you learn those two applications," he points out, "you can go on to other applications pretty easily." "Is this all there is to it?" one student asked him.

"I always try to make the applications interesting," Dickerson continues. "To teach the Excel class, I brought in local grocery store ads. Students created spreadsheets to compare prices and items at different stores and generated shopping lists. For Access, I found a sample database that was perfect for the schoolteachers in the class. They entered information on their own pupils into a database and then calculated grades."

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"As the Elijah Neighborhood Project center attracted more people," Dickerson says, "we needed more computers, so we got into building them ourselves—it was certainly less expensive than buying new ones." Dickerson volunteered to develop and teach a new class that would show people how to assemble computers. The computers they built would stay at the center. "The goal was not to become technical experts," he explains, "but to understand how computers are put together. For example, if your own computer's hard drive malfunctions, you could replace it."

The first computer-building class included the Elijah Project center director, Dickerson's minister, and a few others. Following the first class, Dickerson taught another class in which students built five more computers for the center. "Soon we started getting requests from people who wanted to build and keep their own computers. So now we offer a program where participants buy the parts, and we show them how to assemble their own PCs," he says.

"We even took pictures of the classes," he says. "When people visit the center and are dubious that their neighbors actually assemble computers, we pull out the photos as proof."

Volunteers and Participants Multiply

A local newspaper article on the Elijah Project generated new volunteers from the church, and some of the students who took classes became volunteers and helped mentor less experienced computer students. Flyers about the center generated more volunteers and resulted in more people coming to use the center.

Thanks to additional volunteers, the Elijah Project has expanded its computer program. According to Dickerson, the center now offers three beginning and intermediate classes a week for Windows and Access. "We can't meet demand," he adds. "We have 15 computers, but one class had 18 students and another had 21. At first, people came just from the immediate area, but now the computer classes draw people from all over the city and suburbs of Detroit."

In addition to classes, the center's computer lab is open during the week. Seniors often come to make greeting cards, and younger adults write and print résumés. According to Dickerson, the minister of the Plymouth United Church of Christ is letting the center clients use his digital camera. During the summer, children and youth attending the Elijah Project's youth program will also be using the computer lab. "I don't teach classes any more but run a Computer Doctor Night each month to help people with their computer problems and answer their questions," Dickerson says.

Dickerson sees other positive impacts of the Elijah Project Neighborhood Networks Center. "Some people who come here are also reconnecting with neighborhood institutions, like the church, and forming friendships with others at the center." ♦

NNewsline

NNewsline focuses on topics relevant to Neighborhood Networks centers

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New Look for NNewsline

Welcome to *NNewsline*, the newly revised newsletter for Neighborhood Networks center staff and residents. As HUD strives to make Neighborhood Networks an invaluable resource for the people it serves, *NNewsline* brings you Neighborhood Networks news and information on the activities of your fellow centers, as well as more indepth articles to help you improve your center's operations and programs. Each quarterly issue will have a theme, such as this issue on volunteers. The articles will provide great how-to information for helping your center

increase resident self-sufficiency and community building. *NNewsline* will also feature electronic resources to help you find more information about article topics on the Internet.

In each issue, we want to profile one of you. If you are or know of a center director, staff member, or resident who is doing great things, please let us know. Send your ideas, and any other comments or suggestions for *NNewsline*, to Matt Pierre, Neighborhood Networks Newsletter Coordinator, at mpierre@aspensys.com. ♦

Finding Good Volunteers

Volunteers can be a tremendous asset for Neighborhood Networks centers. However, making good use of volunteers can be a management challenge. Volunteers require a significant investment of time in recruitment, training, and supervision that may not be repaid if your volunteers do not have the skills, motivation, and commitment to meet your program needs.

How can a Neighborhood Networks center coordinator get and keep good volunteers? How can you manage your volunteers to maintain a stable, productive, mutually beneficial relationship?

Many volunteer management experts agree that the first, most vital step is to look inward and analyze your own program. What do you need volunteers to do? Recruiting or accepting volunteers without a clear definition of how they will contribute to your efforts is a bit like buying items because they are on sale, only to have them gather dust in your closet. Having volunteer assignments that clearly define what you want volunteers to do allows you to recruit people who are interested in those activities.

Once you have brainstormed and refined a wish list of what you really need volunteers to do, think through



these tasks from the perspective of the volunteer. How meaningful are the activities on your list? What is the time requirement? Do the tasks require specific experience? What training is needed, and will you provide it?

In *Strategies for Volunteer Recruitment & Retention* (www.gfc.state.ga.us/Publications/UrbanCommunityForestry/StrategiesforVolunteer.pdf), Charlotte King points out, "Most volunteers do not want to simply stuff envelopes or spend their free time doing thankless tasks no one else wants to do." Volunteers most often want to participate in direct service delivery

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because they can see and feel a connection to a specific goal, idea, or community benefit. King says that the highest level of volunteerism is policymaking, enabling volunteers to become stakeholders. "These are volunteers that feel a deep sense of commitment to an issue or project and have the ability to inspire others and to sustain very high levels of involvement." She also emphasizes that stakeholders make great board of directors, committee chairs, and community partner leaders. She warns against underusing a highly committed volunteer.

Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment can be broad based or targeted. Broad-based recruitment can be effective for positions that can easily be done with minimal training. The goal is to keep your organization's volunteer needs in the public eye through media outreach (press releases or calls to reporters) highlighting program events and activities, public-speaking engagements, distribution of recruitment brochures, and other techniques geared toward the public. Some broad-based recruitment tips include the following:

- ❖ Often the only person who will pick up a brochure with the word volunteer on the front is another director of volunteers or a person already working as a volunteer. Find other, more compelling ways to spark an interest in supporting your organization's work.
- ❖ Register with existing volunteer referral services in your community such as volunteer centers and university student volunteer centers. Your community library and city Web site may also distribute listings of local volunteer opportunities.
- ❖ Network with community groups and leaders. Make it your business to know the service groups in your area, what they are interested in, when they meet, and the type of programs they offer. Can you provide a program for one of their meetings and promote your service opportunities simultaneously? School fairs, chamber of commerce events, and community group gatherings may be good places to have a display.

Targeted recruitment is specific, focused, and addressed to the audience that you believe will have the skills, interests, and availability needed for the position. It requires you to analyze the position and define, as clearly as possible, the type of person you are seeking and the type of message that will motivate him or her to serve.

Important recruitment tips include the following:

- ❖ Take advantage of your existing network of employees, clients, volunteers, and community organizations. Which individuals are you in contact with on a regular basis during the course of a day? With which groups do you regularly work? By sharing your volunteer opportunities with these contacts, you may be surprised at the number of recruitment ideas and sources that emerge.
- ❖ Another place to begin your recruitment effort is with your office building, your block, or area businesses and stores within walking distance of your center or volunteer project. Who are your neighbors? Do they know what your organization does? Do they share your concerns? Would they be willing and interested in helping with your project? Even if they are not interested in volunteering, a neighborhood store may be willing to make an in-kind donation to your program. The primary reason people volunteer is because they are asked.
- ❖ Enter into collaborations and partnerships. Possibilities include:
 - ❖ Developing partnerships with service organizations and institutions of higher education. Community colleges frequently engage students in workforce reentry training programs. Colleges, high schools, and youth groups often have internship and service-learning requirements. Maybe your group could offer a service placement? Be creative as you explore partnership options. Once established, these relationships can become long-term sources of volunteers. Some of these organizations even provide administrative support, coaches, and volunteer supervision.

- ◆ Sharing your recruitment work with others. Community groups, such as corporation staff or civic, church, or student groups, often have existing methods of mobilizing and supervising volunteers. Involving them in one-time and ongoing projects can be an efficient way of meeting your volunteer needs. Many large corporations have full-time community relations staff who actively recruit volunteers from corporate employees. It is important to nurture your relationship with groups that provide volunteers. Know their timelines and their needs. Work with another community group or organization to staff a volunteer recruitment booth. The collaboration will enable you to cover more territory and learn about other groups and organizations. Be sure to carefully outline expectations and duties to ensure the success of such collaborations.
- ◆ Joint marketing and public relations, particularly with an area business. Companies want to be viewed favorably by the community. A local business may be willing to develop an advertisement that simultaneously promotes its service and your volunteer opportunities. They may also be willing to provide volunteer recognition such as gifts, food, or supplies for volunteer initiatives.

How to Find Volunteers

Volunteer Recruitment Tips From the Field

Excellent tips and resources are available at: www.txserve.org/mgmt/volrec/needs.html#manage.

Information on this site can help you begin to think about the wide range of individuals and groups that may want to support your efforts.

Do not forget the Internet. Look into posting volunteer opportunities on your center's Web site or on one of the many online resources designed to promote volunteerism. For more information, see the Virtual Volunteering Project's tips for marketing your volunteer opportunities at www.serviceleader.org/vv/vmarket.html.

Keeping track of how each person you interview learned of your program can help you focus your efforts in the area with the greatest return on your investment of time and money.

Keeping Volunteers

A United Parcel Service (UPS) Foundation survey on volunteerism in 1998 found that the most common reasons volunteers stopped working for an organization included time conflicts (65 percent) and poor volunteer management practices (40 percent).

The time crunch: Like other workers, volunteers are busier today, want more schedule flexibility, and change jobs more frequently. Try to be as flexible and creative as possible in scheduling work—consider job sharing and evening and weekend programming. Do not sacrifice your real program needs to accommodate a particular volunteer. One very creative solution to competing time demands might be encouraging family volunteering: find a way for family members to spend time together while also contributing to the community.

Making the volunteer's job as attractive as possible can help you compete with other demands. King's recommendations in *Strategies for Volunteer Recruitment & Retention* for making volunteering attractive include:

- ◆ Make it convenient in both time and location.
- ◆ Offer lots of encouragement, recognition, and program perks like training, free T-shirts, or leadership opportunities.
- ◆ Carefully monitor levels of volunteer satisfaction.
- ◆ Ask for opinions and feedback—give them a sense of ownership.
- ◆ Make sure it feels fun and/or rewarding.
- ◆ Be organized and manage volunteers' time effectively.
- ◆ Offer great refreshments.

For the two out of five volunteers who say they left an organization because of poor volunteer management practices, the most common specific complaints were:

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- ◆ The organization did not make good use of their time.
- ◆ The organization did not make good use of their talents, skills, or expertise.
- ◆ Volunteer tasks were not clearly defined.

Clearly, well-organized and responsive management is critical for keeping volunteers. It is appropriate to be direct and set expectations and timetables so that volunteers know what is expected of them, and to emphasize that their contributions are important. Frequent, realistic performance reviews and positive feedback for well-done work are important. Managers should check frequently for volunteer satisfaction. According to volunteer management consultant Susan Ellis, important questions to ask include: "What skills or talents do you have that we have never asked you to apply on our behalf?" "What needs do you think our clients have that we don't seem to be addressing?" "What would make volunteering here even better?"

Additional Resources for Volunteer Management

"Family Friendly Volunteering: A Guide for Agencies" by Steve McCurley is available through the Points of Light Foundation at (800) 272-8306.

"Where Is CyberVPM.com?" (www.nanhawthorne.com/cybervpm_index.htm) is a one-stop site on volunteerism and volunteer management, with links to most other volunteer sites on the Internet.

The Texas Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service Web site (formerly known as the TxServe Web site), www.txserve.org, is another very comprehensive Web site. *Volunteer Recruitment Tips From the Field* is located here, under the Management Tools section.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

www.bbbsa.org

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America: School-Based Mentoring (\$3.00)

- ◆ Contact Kim Kerns, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 230 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107.

Points of Light Foundation

www.pointsoflight.org

The Power of Youth Service, Developing Effective Programs (call for pricing information)

- ◆ Available through the Points of Light Foundation's Volunteer Marketplace at (800) 272-8306.

100 Black Men of America, Inc.

www.100blackmen.org

100 New Stars Toolkit (cost includes shipping and handling only)

- ◆ Contact Shirley Woodard at (404) 688-5100, ext. 32 or shirley.woodard@100bmoa.org.

United Way of America

www.unitedway.org

The UPS Foundation/United Way of America Volunteer Impact Initiative: Three Volunteer Mobilization Models.

Volunteer Mobilization, Make A Difference video (\$10.00)

Find Fulfillment recruitment brochure (\$2.00)

- ◆ Contact Jim Beal, Director, Community Building National Initiatives, at (703) 836-7100, ext. 436. Jim.Beal@uwa.unitedway.org

Training Outline (\$2.00)

- ◆ Contact Kathy Miron, Community Volunteer Service, at (651) 439-7434 or zcvs2@pressenter.com.

UPS and The UPS Foundation

www.community.ups.com

Downloadable versions of the UPS Foundation's volunteerism reports are available at www.community.ups.com/community/causes/us_relations/impact.html. ◆

Neighborhood Networks Events

This year is becoming a banner year for Neighborhood Networks. Across the country, Neighborhood Networks staff are hard at work developing programs that offer computer and Internet access, literacy programs, and employment opportunities for residents. In addition to efforts at the local level, a number of exciting regional and national events are providing Neighborhood Networks centers and stakeholders the tools they need to succeed.

Two Regional Technical Assistance Workshops (RTAWs)—one in Washington, D.C., April 24–26, and the other in Chicago, Illinois, July 10–12—provided attendees with vital regional resources necessary to develop programs and build self-sufficient residents and communities.

HUD would also like to thank everyone who attended the 2002 Neighborhood Networks National Conference in Miami, Florida, June 26–28. During the conference, participants joined focus groups, networked with potential funders, and learned from other Neighborhood Networks stakeholders' experiences. By sharing resources, experiences, and opportunities, Neighborhood Networks centers, residents, and other stakeholders all worked together to improve their communities and the nation.

The remainder of 2002 promises to be busy with Neighborhood Networks events and activities!

Neighborhood Networks has scheduled its third RTAW for September 11–13 at the Hyatt Regency Los Angeles Hotel at Macy's Plaza. Workshop presentations and sessions will concentrate on trends and issues specific to the west coast. Participants will have the opportunity to network with potential partners and supporters and meet other Neighborhood Networks directors, staff, and stakeholders.

This year's Neighborhood Networks Week, *Delivering Technology Access to America's Communities*, will be held August 11–18. Throughout the week, a variety of local, regional, and national activities will showcase the success and achievements of your centers. By participating in Neighborhood Networks Week activities, you can learn about the programs at other centers in the Neighborhood Networks community and help kick off a national celebration for Neighborhood Networks' seventh birthday, coming this September.

For more information on upcoming Neighborhood Networks events, contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at (888) 312-2743 or visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. ♦

From Our Guest Columnist

The Scott County Learning Center in Waldron, Arkansas, has successfully attracted volunteers—many of whom are former participants in its programs. Miles Graham, executive director, talks about how his center manages and maintains volunteers.

NN: Tell me a little about your center and its activities.

MG: We are located in a small town—Waldron's population is 3,200 and Scott County's is 11,000. In our first year of operation [the center opened in November 2000], we served more than 3,000 people. The center provides a wide range of activities including workforce

development, tutoring, and literacy, GED, life skills, and parenting classes. The center serves residents [of the Scott County Apartments] and community members, including seniors, young adults, and children.

NN: In what activities do volunteers participate?

MG: Our volunteers do a lot of different tasks. For example, most of our fundraising is done by a volunteer who is one of our former students. She completed the Microsoft Office 2000 class and is now an office manager at a local clinic. She feels she is giving something back.

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Most of our volunteers are former students who help us by teaching or tutoring. It is important to treat volunteers like employees so they know their value, but try not to lock them into doing tasks they do not want to do.

NN: What do you mean by “treat them like employees” and why?

MG: For example, our volunteers clock in and out. This helps us too because it makes it easier for us to calculate this time as “in-kind services” when we are writing grant applications and have to explain our matching funds.

NN: What do volunteers get out of volunteering at your center?

MG: A sense of accomplishment. They also get experience in a field that they might want to get into later. It also gives them a sense of community, which is especially important in small towns. One of our volunteers, who is retired, teaches and assists with fundraising. I think she should be out enjoying life, so I asked her why she volunteers for us. She said, “It makes me feel valuable.”

NN: How do the volunteers help your center?

MG: We are trying to get some of our classes accredited so students can get college credit. One of our instructors is a retired chemistry professor who holds three Ph.D. degrees. She teaches classes at the center free of charge. She is also one of the founders of the Head Start program. She is providing us with valuable advice on a daycare center we are trying to establish.

NN: Do you have any advice for other Neighborhood Networks centers on how to attract and maintain volunteers?

MG: Treat them with respect. Be organized. Volunteers will lose interest if there is chaos. Many volunteers are seniors or professional people who want to make sure their time is quality time. Do not be scared to let volunteers branch out. Use them as a resource. Don’t just think of them as a body—they are also a mind. They have life experiences and bring new perspectives that you can use. Volunteers can be the best advertisers for your program. ♦

Visit our Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org
Call our toll-free number at (888) 312-2743